

FORT MONROE, CHAPEL OF THE CENTURION
(Post Chapel, Building No. 166)
Hampton
Hampton County
Virginia

HABS NO. VA-595-B

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE CHAPEL OF THE CENTURION (Post Chapel, Building #166)

HABS No. VA-595-B

Location: Off Ruckman Road
Fort Monroe
Hampton, Virginia

Present Owner: United States Army

Present Use: Nondenominational Chapel

Significance: The Chapel of the Centurion was constructed based on designs by Gothic revivalist-architect, Richard Upjohn. In 1852, Upjohn published standardized plans for a chapel, rectory, school, and other buildings in Rural Architecture. Constructed 1857-1858, the Chapel of the Centurion is a modified version of Upjohn's published plans. The Chapel is also noteworthy for its stained-glass memorial windows, three of which are attributed to Louis Comfort Tiffany and his Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company in New York City, New York.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection: 1857-1858.
2. Architect: Based on designs of Richard Upjohn published in Rural Architecture in 1852. Born in Dorset, England, in 1802 and trained as a cabinet maker, Richard Upjohn emigrated to New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1829 and settled in Boston in 1834. Though his earliest works have been described as Greek Revival, Upjohn soon aligned himself with the doctrines of Augustus W. N. Pugin and began producing the Gothic Revival buildings which became his hallmark. Upjohn was the first architect to accurately translate not only Gothic detailing but also Gothic proportion from English pattern books to American churches. Perhaps Upjohn's most famous commission was that for Trinity Church (1839-1845). Upjohn's designs for Trinity were based largely on Pugin's work published in The True Principles of Pointed Architecture. The success of the Trinity Church design catapulted Richard Upjohn to prominence and soon his services were in demand as far west as Wisconsin and as far south as Alabama. By 1850, Upjohn's firm was inundated with work. Unable to devote enough time to every church congregation wanting a Gothic Revival church, Upjohn assembled a package of working drawings of his designs for a small church, chapel, parsonage, and school house. These detailed drawings were published in 1852 costing \$5 a copy and offered smaller parishes an economically feasible and well-designed prototype which Upjohn said any intelligent mechanic would be able to carry out.
3. Craftsmen: Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933), noted architect and craftsman, was the son of Charles L. Tiffany, founder of Tiffany, Young, and Ellis (established 1841) which was later (1853) recognized as the famed jewelry and silver store, Tiffany and Company. Louis Comfort Tiffany was the pupil of George Inness and Samuel Coleman (New York), and Leon Bailly (Paris); Tiffany travelled extensively in Europe early in his life and painted in oil and water color, but eventually devoted himself to decorative glasswork and architecture. Tiffany's work with stained glass represented the attempt to recover the lost art of decorative glass. By the 1880s, when Tiffany established his company, artists and architects were concerned with artistic and material integrity as generated by the various manifestations of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe. Tiffany adhered to these doctrines and experimented with the making of stained glass with its true medieval formulae and properties. Tiffany was dogmatic concerning the integrity of stained glass windows. The only painted detail allowed was the face and hands in a figure window. Tiffany drew on whatever inspiration was necessary to arrive at the design for a commission. The works of Carracci, Raphael, and Ingres frequently found their way into Tiffany designs.

4. Original plans and construction: Upjohn estimated the small mission church in his pattern book to cost about \$3000 depending on the exactness with which the builder relied on Upjohn's specifications. The designs called for a building with a nave, chancel, robing room, and lateral tower. The chapel was designed to have plain lancet windows in the nave and a triple lancet window in the chancel. A simple, wood shingled, steeply-pitched roof over both nave and chancel was supported by exposed, wooden, arched trusses. The interior walls were to be plastered, and the exterior walls were to be covered with board and batten. As modified and originally constructed at Fort Monroe, the Chapel of the Centurion was an enlarged version of the Upjohn prototype without the belltower.
5. Alterations and additions: The builders of the Chapel of the Centurion were able to anticipate the future growth of the congregation and consequently constructed a chapel five bays long rather than the four-bay church Upjohn's plans suggested. This extension increased the seating capacity of the church to 200-225. The chancel fenestration follows exactly Upjohn's specifications. The Chapel of the Centurion has a triple lancet window in the chancel, a large, central lancet flanked by smaller lancets. The fenestration of the nave, however, differs significantly from the Upjohn prototype. Not only is there an extra fenestration bay, but also the lancets are paired, doubling the total number of nave windows. The fenestration over the entry was also increased from one lancet to three. Another notable departure from the Upjohn plan made at the time of the construction was the omission of the lateral tower.

The alterations made after the original construction were integrated less successfully. The exact dates of these alterations are unknown; however, photographs set parameters within which the alterations occurred. The vestibule was the first addition to the Chapel, appearing first in photographs from the

1880s. This vestibule provides the nave with an antechamber which the lateral tower would have provided to the side entrance had it been constructed. Although no original architectural drawings exist for the Chapel and the earliest photographs are nearly twenty years after its construction, physical evidence proves this is an addition. The interior wall between the vestibule and the nave was once the exterior wall. This is made evident by the board and batten in the vestibule which continues the rhythm of the exterior board and batten.

In 1888, a Moller organ was installed into an organ loft located above the nave entry. The Upjohn church prototype suggested the organ be placed in the nave to the right of the chancel, not in an organ loft. It is certain that the loft was a later addition by the awkward handling of the loft which obscures the uppermost section of the nearby lancet windows. The loft was accessed by twin stairways flanking the vestibule entrance into the nave. This loft was damaged by a small fire in 1933 and subsequently altered when it was repaired. The repaired loft was extended two feet farther over the congregation and the railing replaced; one

of the stairways accessing the loft was converted into a closet.

The last discrepancy between Upjohn's patterns for a small wooden church and the Chapel of the Centurion involves the robing room located off to the side of the chancel. As suggested by Upjohn's plans, the robing room was to be a small chamber with access to the chancel, the pulpit, and the outside. It was not designed to be the same length as the chancel. The 1897 U.S. Army map of Fort Monroe shows the Chapel configuration to still be in the Upjohn arrangement. The 1903 map of Fort Monroe shows the Chapel with its robing room extended the length of the chancel creating the present vestry/sacristy.

The replacement of the original lancet windows with memorial stained-glass windows has been a long-term project at the Chapel. Apparently the original design called for diamond-shaped panes of mottled brown and white glass. The Upjohn patterns do not include specifications for the actual lancet design glazing; however, the rendering of the model wooden church does depict the aforementioned windows. By 1970, all of the windows in the nave and chancel had been replaced with memorial stained-glass windows. Only the triple lancet over the vestibule and the windows in the vestry remain unchanged.

The Chapel was renovated in 1968 and was raised approximately two feet to accommodate the installation of HVAC in its new basement. A few interior wood arches were replaced by narrower facsimiles at that time.

B. Historical Context:

As the only religious structure within the fort walls, the Chapel was constructed in 1857 and dedicated May 3, 1858, by Bishop John Johns of St. John's, Hampton, Virginia. The Chapel was commissioned by 1st Lt. Julian McAllister who had survived a laboratory explosion. Many famous people have attended services there. In the 1950s,

President Eisenhower's son was married in the Chapel.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: As the Chapel of the Centurion is based on Upjohn's 1852 published chapel design, it is a rare example of Upjohn's Gothic Revival religious architecture in Virginia.
2. Condition of fabric: As the Chapel was renovated in 1968, the building is in excellent condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Rectangular nave block with vestibule and altar projections from north and south elevations. 30'-4" (three-bay facade) X 104'-2"; one-and-one-half stories.
2. Foundations: Cement and brick foundations, 1'-8" thick.
3. Walls: Board and batten painted white (originally painted red and green, Fort Monroe colors).
4. Structural systems, framing: Wood frame.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: Square wood vestibule added to north facade. Rectangular brick stoop accesses vestibule.
6. Chimneys: The Richard Upjohn prototype, early plans, and photographs show chimneys; none remain. HVAC introduced as part of 1968 renovation.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Paired, Gothic-arched, wooden doors on north side of vestibule. Single, Gothic-arched, wooden door on north side of sacristy.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Triple lancet, diamond-paned window with original beige-mottled glass located on the north facade above the vestibule. Five sets of paired lancet windows along both sides of the nave. These windows originally had the beige-mottled glass found over the vestibule. These windows have been replaced piecemeal by stained-glass memorial windows. There is a large triple lancet, memorial stained-glass window depicting St. Cornelius, the Centurion, to whom

the Chapel is dedicated. A few windows were originally operable; however, most are now sealed.
8. Roof: Steeply pitched gable slate roof.

Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The main block (nave) of the Chapel of the Centurion has a central aisle and two smaller aisles along the east and west walls. To the north of the nave is the vestibule (or narthex) and to the south are the chancel, altar, and sacristy. The shallow basement was added in 1968 and accommodates HVAC system.

2. Stained-glass window memorials: Two of the Tiffany windows at the Chapel of the Centurion date to ca. 1890 and the third dates to 1911. All three represent the variety of glass techniques and window themes utilized by Tiffany in his ecclesiastical window designs. One of the 1890 windows was dedicated to the memory of Lieutenant Julian McAllister, benefactor of the Chapel. This window is an example of a Tiffany ornamental church window. These windows were usually simplified arrangements of symbols and motifs germane to the theme of the memorial window. The McAllister Window consists of a vertical grouping of military symbols surrounded by beige, mottled glass. Near the top is a military crest of crossed cannon. Beneath that is a religious crest consisting of a cross held by an outstretched hand with inscription "per Mare, per terras" (over sea, over land) surrounded by glass jewels. Glass jewels are formed by pressing glass into molds to create the irregular facets which, when in a window, produce prismatic, gem-like reflections of light. Beneath the Latin inscription is a pyramid of 15 glass jewel cannon balls. At the bottom of the window is the dedication inscription.

The Squires window is contemporary with and next to the McAllister window. It is dedicated to the memory of Helen Fargo Squires, who was married in the Chapel October 11, 1881, and died at Fort Monroe in 1886. This window is an example of a Tiffany portrait-figure window. These windows were usually non-ecclesiastical, academic or allegorical themes usually found in libraries and hospitals. The window depicts a classically-clad figure (one assumes, Helen Squires) holding a palm frond. The figure is flanked by Corinthian columns supporting a peculiar trefoil motif. At the top of the window are green and blue glass jewels. At the bottom of the window is the dedication inscription. The window is several inches thick in some places. The folding of the diaphanous gown is represented in actual folds of glass. This glass treatment is known as drapery glass and is considered to be Tiffany's invention. The glass, while still molten, was thrown onto iron tables and manipulated into the folds.

The Gifford Window dates to 1911 and is entitled, "Forbid Them Not." This window depicts the figure of Christ and a child in an Arcadian setting. Again

the folds of the cloak are formed by the generous folds of the glass itself. the countenance are likewise ethereal, as with the Squires Window. The figures are framed by English Gothic-inspired wood cabinetry represented in glass. This window is an example of a Tiffany religious-figure window. Tiffany created representations of all major Old and New Testament stories. christ blessing little children was a perennial favorite. Tiffany catered to this market, publishing several booklets to promote it.

3. Stairways: The northwest corner closet was converted to a stairway accessing the organ loft ca. 1888. The stairway is wooden and simply designed and detailed.

4. Flooring: Carpeted wood floors.
5. Wall and Ceiling finish: Walls are plaster and painted white; ceilings are wood with an exposed wooden truss system with Gothic detailing.
6. Decorative features and trim: Quatrefoils appear near the top of the ceiling trusses; pendants appear where trusses (and roof) meet the walls.
7. Mechanical equipment: Original heating system required chimneys. It is not known if there were open fireplaces, stoves, or furnaces. In 1968 a completely integrated HVAC was installed in the new basement.

D. Site:

The Chapel faces north and is located in the south corner of the Parade Ground at the intersection of Bernard and Ruckman Roads.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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ADDENDUM TO:
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National Park Service
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1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001